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ABSTRACT

The paper examines interpretive aspects of English non-uniformity among fifth and sixth grade Native Americans at Laguna Elementary School, Laguna, New Mexico. Speaker assessments of instances of uninflected "be" are ordered to form an implicational scale. The variability in the students' assessment pattern is compared to previous inter-ethnic testing and scaling. Considerable lack of mid-range progressions is documented in the response population. Two polar groups of students are identified by the patterning of their assessments. Although social variables are reported not to condition this non-uniformity, the addition of assessments from adult community members fills in mid-range progressions. This suggests either that non-adults can start at two ends of the constructed English continuum and still converge in a common lectal area as adults, or that rapid linguistic change has caused non-adults to diverge from adult patterns or standards. Practical aspects of non-uniformity and developmental or change stages thereof are potentially far-reaching for curriculum planning, development of instructional strategies and techniques of measurement and evaluation. Additional kinds of questions are raised, and data sources necessary for further interpretive exploration are identified. (Author/AM)

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# ENGLISH NON-UNIFORMITY: A NON-ADULT FORM OF ETHNIC ENGLISH

Steven Owen Stout

This paper examines interpretive aspects of English non-uniformity among fifth and sixth grade Native Americans from Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico. The material contained in the present paper is one aspect of my doctoral research through the American University, Washington, D.C., and through my position as Reading Specialist at Laguna Elementary School..

The linguistic variable selected for study is uninflected be. Four sentences are of special interest.

1. I be home soon.
2. I be an adult when I can vote.
3. That man, he be the governor.
4. Robins be flying in the sky.

According to previous investigations by Fasold (1969), Wolfram (1969,1974) and Leap (1977), uninflected forms of be could be derived from underlying will, would, inflected be, or do support. Fasold (1969) and Wolfram (1969,1974) argue the significance of this underlying marking for Black English Vernacular in terms of phonological reduction and deletion versus a separate and tenseless or "distributive" be. Leap (1977) adds support to the general concept of a distributive principle and documents its extent within a

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variety of Indian English and non-Indian varieties of English.

In addition to observing language in use, all three investigators utilize a sentence-analysis dialogue (see Fasold 1969 for original formulation) constructed to elicit underlying auxiliary support. Leap's (1977) protocol, which substituted Indian English sentences for the Black English sentences of Fasold (1969), was utilized in the data collection for this paper. The key to the protocol is the conditioning of the respondent to provide an auxiliary verb for the stimulus sentences within the dialogue. Thus,

I: John drives a car.
R: I know he does.
I: Does what?
R: Drives a car.

When the stimulus sentence That man, he be the governor. is uttered by the interviewer, the respondent begins with the patterned frame I know ____ _____., and supplies a pronoun and an auxiliary verb (will, would, is or do) indicating the tense/aspect details of the sentence verb. The interviewer copies the supplied auxiliary in the patterned frame _____ what?. Then, the respondent repeats the remainder of the stimulus sentence.

This paper is concerned only with the tense/aspect assessment of uninflected be. Speaker assessments of the four instances of uninflected be are ordered to form an implicational scale. A lectal summary of the scale is

provided in Table A.

TABLE A. Laguna Elementary lectal summary.

| Lectal pattern | No. of respondents |
|---|---|
| $S_1$ $S_2$ $S_3$ $S_4$ | |
| LECT I 0 0 0 0 | 17 |
| LECT II X 0 0 0 | 6 |
| LECT III X X 0 0 | 1 |
| LECT IV 0 X 0 0 | 1 |
| LECT V 1 X 0 0 | 1 |
| LECT VI 1 0 0 0 | 9 |

The horizontal axis in Table A represents the four sentences while the vertical axis is a summation of response types (lects). Within the matrices 0 indicates a modal assessment, X indicates a response with inflected be, and 1 indicates a do assessment. The latter is the key marking of interest since it is the classic distributive be marking defined for Black English Vernacular. Each column represents the range of assessments given to the tense/aspect detail of a single sentence. Each row (or "lect") represents a pattern of assessment shared by one or more of the students for the four sentences taken as a set. The student frequencies within each lect is included to the right of the scale. The intensity ascribed to the lectal pattern by students raise the issues of central concern in this paper. The reader is referred to Stout and Erting (1977) for the principles used in scale construction.

Some of the issues treated here stem from past presentations to SWALLOW along with Carol Erting (SWALLOW IV) and William Leap (SWALLOW V) on the relatedness and diversity

of Ethnic English. Our aim has been to describe and define Native American English as opposed to other Ethnic English(es), yet the data continually support broader interpretations of English.

Leap (1977) demonstrates that identified speakers of Standard and Nonstandard English, whether Indian or not, show a high degree of variation. This is reflected both in the frequency of characteristic construction types and in the interpretation given to aspects of these construction types when grammatical assessments are elicited from the speaker. Using the same data corpus, Erting and Stout (1975) demonstrate how the assessments of uninflected be constructions given by Isletan, Anglo, Spanish and Black respondents fall into a set of linked (partially related, partially distinctive) response patterns (or lects). The pattern is strongly reminiscent of the continuum model utilized by Bickerton (1973,1975) and associates to capture variation in post-creole Caribbean communities.

Of particular interest here is the discovery that once the continuum had been established using Anglo, Spanish, Black and Isletan data, the addition of Cheyenne responses fell perfectly within the identified continuum. This observation led us to a more general hypothesis, stated here as:

> The range and order of variation for a given linguistic feature among a group of vernacular English speakers is indicative of the range and order for any other group (compare Stout and Erting 1977).

This parallels Leap (1977) where he suggests the channeling of non-English influence in terms of natural English principles.

Where the nature of "nonstandard" or "ethnic" English is concerned, this is a potentially powerful observation. In a paper prepared for SWALLOW V (Leap and Stout 1976), the hypothesis was examined in terms of a corpus of uninflected be assessments from fifth and sixth grade students at Laguna Elementary School. We found the overall range of variability in the students' assessment patterns support the scope of variability found in the 1975 inter-ethnic study.

Table B indicates one additional lect, Lect IV, has been added although it was represented in the 1975 scale as a variant of Lect II. More importantly, four lects (Lects IV, V, VI and VIII) in the 1975 study were not represented in the data collected from the Laguna students. This represents a significant weakness of mid-range lects, especially if the lack of intensity ascribed to lects III, IV and V is taken into consideration. Of these, only one student occurs in each lect (see Table A).

TABLE B. Lectal comparison Laguna Elementary versus 1975 inter-ethnic scale.

| Laguna Elementary | | 1975 Inter-ethnic | |
|---|---|---|---|
| LECT I | 0 0 0 0 | LECT I | 0 0 0 0 |
| LECT II | X 0 0 0 | LECT II | X 0 0 0 |
| *LECT III | X X 0 0 | LECT III | X X 0 0 - |
| *LECT IV | 0 X 0 0 | | 0 X 0 0 |
| | | LECT IV | X X X 0 |

TABLE B. (Continued)

| Laguna Elementary | | 1975 Inter-ethnic | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | LECT V | 1 X X 0 |
| | | LECT VI | 1 1 1 0 |
| *LECT V | 1 X 0 0 | LECT VII | 1 X 0 0 |
| | | LECT VIII | 1 1 0 0 |
| LECT VI | 1 0 0 0 | LECT IX | 1 0 0 0 |

*These lects tend to obscure the magnitude of the gap in the continuum. Each of the three are represented by one respondent.

Leap and Stout (1976) have argued that community-specific intensities and patterning are to be expected. The polar-end clustering with minimal mid-range clustering could also be considered a clue to how Laguna English could be "similar" to other English varieties and yet be "unique" at the same time. Indeed, the difference in intensity ascribed to particular lects is the only divergence between the ethnic English(es) represented by Isletan, Cheyenne, Anglo, Spanish and Black populations in the 1975 study.

Before exploring the lack of mid-range clustering, it is useful to identify the meaning of the polar ranges of the 1975 continuum. The 1975 study did not reveal a uni-directional wave-like movement as demonstrated in Caribbean post-creole studies. Thus, no identification of either a basilectal or acrolectal end of the continuum was made. Nevertheless, Anglos clustered at the center of the continuum and we assumed the possibility of a center-based acrolect or standard. More importantly, we were able to

show for Isletans that the greater the reported fluency in Isletan Tiwa the more they tended to cluster in the Anglo range. This appears to lend tremendous support for bilingual fluency and the development of Standard English control at Isleta; the reverse of the relationship usually assumed and one often responsible for schools refusing to devote time to languages other than English. On this basis the prediction was made that bilingual control of an Indian language and English does not demand different English usage than monolingual Anglos demonstrate. The prediction was then checked for Cheyenne respondents and fluency in Cheyenne was found to have exactly the opposite effect as fluency in Isletan Tiwa. Thus, bilingual Isletans clustered in the center and upper ranges of the continuum with Anglos, whereas bilingual Cheyennes clustered in the lower ranges. To be bilingual therefore seems to have different English significance for different Indian communities.

Faced with these kinds of interpretive issues for the non-uniformity of the Laguna data, I have explored whether something as basic as bilingual versus monolingual control could be responsible for the polar-end spread within the population. Bilingual versus monolingual control did not prove significant.

The significance of other variables have been examined. High academic achievers as a population were expected to cluster at one end of the continuum or the

other. This would suggest a rationale for the degree of linguistic non-uninformity (a social reality for the linguistic continuum) and a valuable diagnostic index for predicting academic achievement on the basis of student position on the English continuum. This was not the case. Such variables as sex, village of residence, travel, and living experiences beyond the pueblo were also examined. Unfortunately, no variable stood out as having any significance.

The investigation of socio-cultural variables has not been formalized at present. Instead, the corpus has been extended to include adult responses in hopes that this would yield interpretive insight on the two polar groupings of students.

Table C demonstrates the clustering of adult assessments in the mid-range of the continuum, exactly where the gap existed in the patterning of student responses. This does not fill in all four of the missing lects reflected in the 1975 study, but it does provide increased intensity in the existing mid-range lects.

TABLE C. Addition of adult corpus, Laguna 1977.

| Laguna 1977 | | No. of students | No. of adults |
|---|---|---|---|
| LECT I | 0 0 0 0 | 17 | 1 |
| LECT II | X 0 0 0 | 6 | 0 |
| LECT III | X X 0 0 | 1 | 3 |
| LECT IV | 0 X 0 0 | 1 | 3 |
| LECT V | 1 X 0 0 | 1 | 5 |
| LECT VI | 1 X X 0 | 0 | 1 |
| LECT VII | 1 0 0 0 | 9 | 4 |

Table D shows the percentage of persons within different combinations of lects. The following intensities are of particular interest: 91 percent of the students' responses fell in lects I, II and VII, whereas 71 percent of the adult responses fell in the remaining lects (lects III, IV, V and VI). This represents a significant difference in mid-range clustering since only 9 percent of the student responses were mid-range (III, IV, V and VI). Different comparisons of intensity could also be obtained in terms of other lectal groupings. For example, lects I and II, where 66 percent of the students fall could be contrasted with lects III, IV V, VI and VII, where 94 percent of the adult responses are. Also notice that of all the lects, Lect VII is the only one shared to any significant degree by students and adults.

TABLE D. Lectal groupings: Student versus adult intensities.

| | Student percentage | Adult percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Lects I,II,VII | 91 | 30 |
| III,IV,V,VI | 9 | 71 |
| I,II | 66 | 6 |
| III,IV,V,VI,VII | 34 | 94 |

Regardless of how the lects are grouped for comparative purposes, the different intensities ascribed to these lects attest to some very striking differences between adult and non-adult responses. These also provide an approximation of what adult versus non-adult English could mean within the study of Ethnic English. Interpretation of

the continuum is as yet unfinished. The adult corpus would suggest that non-adults can start at two ends of the English continuum and still converge in a common lectal area as adults. This would attest to two English traditions among non-adults which reduce to a single lectal area on reaching adulthood. This somewhat surprising conclusion raises two questions:

> 1. What if the adults did not start at the polar ends of the Laguna English continuum as hypothesized?

and,

> 2. Even if these adults did make this kind of linguistic progression to the center, what assurrence do we have that the current generation of elementary-aged persons will make this same convergent movement?

The impact of adding the adult assessments to the corpus highlights the importance of obtaining assessments from a variety of age categories. For example, consider the possibility of the data from the grandparental generation spread at the polar ends, rather than clustering in the mid-range with the younger adults sampled earlier. This pattern would indicate rapid linguistic change. A more expectable result would identify the grandparents with the other adults in the mid-range of the continuum. If adolescents were then added to the sample, and if they clustered more in the mid-range than the elementary-aged students (yet not as much as the adults) the difference between adult and non-adult English would be demonstrated in terms of acquisitional stages within the community.

For people dealing with the practical aspects of English variability the implications of the non-uniformity and the developmental or change stages thereof are potentially far reaching for curriculum planning, development of instructional strategies and techniques of measurement and assessment. It is my intention that research along the lines outlined in this paper will facilitate these efforts, and indicate the spectrum of data necessary for interpretation of student development.

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